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ABSTRACT

Students' experiences of daily classroom activities and the larger school context were studied at the Robert W. Coleman Elementary School, Baltimore (Maryland). Coleman is an inner-city school serving about 500 African American children in prekindergarten through grade 5. The school is organized into three campuses--primary, "Coleman" for grades 2 and 3, and "Marshall Mitchell" for grades 4 and 5. Teachers of each campus serve as a team, and students above the primary level move from teacher to teacher throughout the day. With a few exceptions, classes are single- gender, and Coleman is the first year-round school in Maryland, with 9- week sessions followed by 3-week intersessions of mini-courses. Undergirding practices at Coleman is the Urban Learner Framework of Research for Better Schools, Inc., a model that emphasizes the strengths of urban learners and the necessity for culturally sensitive instruction that capitalizes on the resilience of urban students. The ethnographic study of Coleman relied on observations of 5 teachers and interviews with 70 students to create a picture of the school's culture of academic success through the eyes of its students. An appendix contains the student interview questions. (Contains 26 references.) (SLD)

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"We GET to LEARN!": Building Urban Children's Sense of Future in an Elementary School

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"We GET to LEARN!":
Urban Children's Voices and Experiences
in a Changing Elementary School

David A. Kinney

Glimpses of Student Experiences at Robert W. Coleman Elementary School

A first grade teacher is starting the math lesson and she says, " I'm going to make your brains tickle." The children laugh and smile and watch her attentively. She asks a question about a math problem on the board and most students raise their hands excitedly, waving them so that they will be called on. She calls on a student who then gives the right answer and says, " I saw you thinking, I knew you would get the right answer." She says, "Very good, let me shake your hand!" The student beams with pride (Excerpts from field notes, 10-24-95).

Third graders reported that they like their teachers and thoroughly enjoy their classes. One girl said enthusiastically: "I think she [is] a good teacher because she like[s] to teach." A boy told us: "[We] have great teachers and [we] have all kinds of programs" (Excerpts from interviews with third graders, 10-25-94).

Fifth graders also discussed how much they appreciate attending Coleman. A girl said: "We learn new things every day, and I'm happy that they started year-round education, so we can learn more, and ... we might be ... smarter." Two boys described their teacher as: "an understanding teacher, he helps us out ... he is the nicest teacher I ever had!" (Excerpts from interviews with fifth graders, 10-31-94).

INTRODUCTION

While much has been written about urban school reform by policymakers and researchers, the bulk of this material gives little attention to how students experience and perceive these changes. Moreover, there is a paucity of information regarding students' experiences of daily classroom activites and the larger school climate from the children's point of view (Erickson and Schultz, 1992). In this paper I draw on observations and interviews with elementary school (PreK - 5) children to illustrate recurrent patterns in their daily lives at Robert W. Coleman School in Baltimore.

The paper is divided into several sections. After a discussion of the setting and methods I provide an overview of the rationale and relevant research which has guided this project. Next I present recurrent themes from the student interview and observational data which highlight frequent and central aspects of the lives of Coleman's children. Finally, I conclude with a brief summary and discussion of some questions for future research.

SETTING

Driving along North Avenue in Baltimore on the way to Robert W. Coleman Elementary School, one cannot help but notice that what was once a prosperous, middle and working class neighborhood, is now beset by many of the social problems facing America's inner cities today. However, inside this public school on the west side of the city, there is a different feeling. The walls of Coleman are bright and colorful, elegantly covered with students' art work and school projects. Visitors to the school are greeted by the proud, smiling, and exuberant faces of the African American children who spend their days at Coleman.

Baltimore is the fourteenth largest city in the United States and the largest in Maryland, with a population of 736,014 in 1990 (Johnson and Dailey, 1995). Baltimore has been a principal port city since the 18th century and currently ranks as the nation's second port in foreign tonnage. The city's major business includes steel manufacturing, heavy and light industries, ship construction, and scientific research. About ten percent of Baltimore city residents are unemployed and twenty-two percent of residents live below the poverty level. Between 1980 and 1990 Baltimore experienced a 6.4 percent decline in population. The city's population is African-American (59.2 percent), white (39.1 percent), Asian and Pacific

Islander (1.1 percent), and Latino (1 percent) (1990 U.S. Census in Johnson & Dailey, 1995).

Robert W. Coleman Elementary School is located next to Frederick Douglas High School, Baltimore's renowned African American high school. Coppin State University and Baltimore City Community College are also nearby. During the 1970s and 1980s unemployment and poverty rates significantly increased as factories closed while the country changed from an industrial economy to a service economy (Wilson, 1987). The neighborhood currently faces many challenges reflected in the lack of job opportunities, significant distance to medical and social service agencies, and high levels of crime, drug dealing, and violence. The neighborhood is now characterized by relatively high levels of poverty, young parents, and a small elderly working class population.

Coleman Elementary School serves about 500 African American pre-kindergarten through fifth grade students. About 85 percent qualify for free or reduced lunch. All but two of the 20 regular classroom teachers are African American, and all the administrators are African American. The school is organized into three "campuses": the primary campus for pre-kindergarten, kindergarten and first grades; the Coleman campus for second and third grades; and the Marshall Mitchell campus for fourth and fifth grades. The teachers of each of these campuses function as teams with authority to shape instruction, develop programs, and reorganize the school day. Each teacher specializes in one of the four core subject areas: language arts, mathematics, science, or social studies. Children move from teacher to teacher throughout the day with the exception of the primary students who move just once during the day, from a language arts/social studies teacher to a mathematics/science teacher.

All of the classes, with the exception of special education and programs such as Gifted and Talented and the Sylvan Learning Center (for remediation of mathematics and reading) are single gender (see Johnson, 1995 for the rationale underlying this change). In addition, after several years of research and discussion among staff and parents, in August 1994, Coleman became the first year-round school in Maryland. Children attend school for nine week sessions followed by a three week intersession offering a rich assortment of mini-courses ranging from in-depth study of a topic, to the arts, to career introductions. The courses are taught by professionals, parents, and teachers who must submit proposals for their course offering (see Lipman, 1995). These are some of the characteristics which may contribute to Coleman's high rank in the Baltimore City School District in reading and mathematics test scores. In fact, since Addie E. Johnson became principal of Coleman in 1987, student test scores have risen from the lowest quartile to the top quartile in the district (Baltimore City Public Schools, 1993-94). Despite the critical failure of many urban schools to educate poor children and children of color, there are examples of schools and teachers who help students meet challenging academic standards in a supportive, culturally responsive, and empowering context; Coleman is one of these schools.

Addie E. Johnson, principal of Robert W. Coleman Elementary School, invited members of the Urban Education Project at Research for Better Schools to visit her school and help her delineate the kinds of teacher-student relations, instructional activities, curricula, and school programs which were supporting the significant increases in her students' achievement. She had learned about the Urban Learner Framework (ULF) we developed and saw it as a source of theoretical grounding to undergird practices at Coleman School.

In brief, the ULF (Urban Education Project, 1994) presents four research-based themes which, in combination, generate a vision of urban learners as culturally-diverse, capable, motivated, and resilient. This new vision of the urban learner focuses on urban children's cultural backgrounds, their unique strengths and talents, and the importance of tapping into their intrinsic motivation and effort. These elements, taken together, foster students' resilence and likelihood of leading productive, successful lives. The ULF also discusses the ramifications of the research-based themes for decisionmaking within four functional areas of school organization: (1) determining appropriate curriculum, instruction, and assessment; (2) designing effective staff development programs; (3) establishing a supportive school environment; and (4) building visionary leadership and effective management. In the summer of 1994, Pauline Lipman, an educational anthropologist, and I began a collaboration with the principal, staff, students, and parents of Coleman to document what aspects of the Urban Learner Framework (Williams and Newcombe, 1994; Urban Education Project, 1994) were operating at Coleman and which research-based themes might be extended based on new information gained from the Coleman success story. Overall, our collaboration has three goals: (1) to capture what can be learned from the school's strengths that might inform other educators; (2) to share what we learned with staff and parents and to support their efforts to improve the school and make their vision a reality; and (3) to inform future development of the Urban Learner Framework (Urban Education Project, 1994).

METHODS

In the summer of 1994, Pauline Lipman and I began a collaboration with the principal, staff, students, and parents of Coleman. Our ethnographic study began in July 1994 when we

visited the school twice to interview the principal and meet some of the staff. During August we mapped out a strategy for data collection in the fall. Subsequently we spent three days a week at the school for five intermittent weeks during September, October, and November 1994 collecting data.. During those five weeks we we conducted open-ended interviews and conversations with teachers and administrators, professional and non-professional staff, parents, students, community residents, volunteers, Project 2000 staff, and a college instructor and others who taught in the school's first intersession. In general, our data collection efforts were focused on delineating those aspects of the school which support students' achievement and help them develop a strong sense of future. In November we finished transcribing all interviews and completed an initial analysis of the data. In December Pauline and I spent two days at the school discussing our findings with faculty, staff, and parents.

Specifically, interviews were audio-taped and transcribed. We observed classes, assemblies, school activities, meetings, the Coleman Parent Academy, a class for Coleman students taught at a community college campus, summer camp, intersession classes, and everyday life in the school, and we videotaped intersession activities. We recorded these observations in fieldnotes and collected archival videotapes of school activities, conferences, events, and media coverage of the school, and other archival data (Lipman, 1995; Lipman and Kinney, 1994). In the context of collaboration and teamwork, my focus was students' experiences; Pauline Lipman's was teachers' and parents' experiences.

In addition to school-wide observations, we selected five teachers to observe for at least one full day and to interview at least once using an open-ended interview format. These teachers were chosen by a modified "community nomination process" (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

We asked parents and administrators to identify seven teachers "who you believe reflect what Coleman is all about and the direction in which Coleman is moving." Of the eight top choices, we selected five who represented a range of grade levels, new teachers and veterans, at least one African American male teacher since Project 2000 focuses on African American male students, and at least one white teacher to explore the socialization of white teachers in a predominantly African American school. Our choices also precluded a disproportion of classes with students identified as having special needs. We observed the five teachers' classes, interviewed them about their teaching and educational philosophy, had on-going conversations with them throughout the fall, and interviewed about fifty percent of their students.

Specifically, I interviewed students from first, third, fourth, and fifth grades after having observed them in class for at least two or three hours. Students were chosen to reflect the range of effort observed during class. Most interviews were with small groups of two to four students. The interviews resembled informal conversations about their school experiences, concerns, aspirations, and definitions of school success (see Appendix A for a complete listing of the questions). It is important to note that some interviews were interrupted by lunch and other scheduled events which precluded covering all topics of interest during several of the interviews. I found the students were eager to share their perceptions and experiences with me. They were open and candid while responding to the interview questions. Overall, I interviewed 70 students.

Data from interviews and observations were transcribed and analyzed to yield the recurrent patterns of student experiences discussed in the sections below. Data analysis has

been an ongoing activity through regular reading of the transcripts, sorting of the data, and frequent conversations with Addie Johnson and members of the Urban Education Project at Research for Better Schools regarding emerging themes. Specifically, fieldnotes from observations and student statements from interviews were sorted and categorized based on their consistency and similarity to specific issues and concerns. These analyses yielded more refined categories and tentative findings between central aspects of students' experiences. These findings should be treated as working hypotheses or assertions (Erickson, 1986) which have emerged from the preliminary data collection and analysis of this initial investigation of the Coleman community. More specifically, assertions are primarily generated from induction based on a careful review of all the available data. Once assertions are developed, the researchers continue to review "the data corpus to test the validity of the assertions that were generated, seeking disconfirming evidence as well as confirming evidence" (Erickson, 1986, p.145). In the ethnographic tradition and given the relatively short time period with which to collect the data for the present symposium the preliminary assertions reported below require further ethnographic and survey research to systematically refine and extend the present themes (i.e., working hypotheses). Pauline and I feel we have just begun to understand the complex and rich Coleman community. An initial ethnography of a school, like the one reported here, should surface questions for further research. We have developed a number of questions for future research based on our initial study and we hope our preliminary reports will assist other researchers in creating central questions for their studies of school reform and child development. The next section discusses the rationale and relevant research which guided my interviews and observations of students.

RATIONALE AND FRAMEWORK

In general, there has been little systematic research on successful urban schools. However, Janet Ward Schofield's (1990) writings regarding generalizability and qualitative research provide a point of departure for studying successful and progressive urban elementary schools. Schofield (1990, p.217) cogently argues that qualitative research on education should include studies of "what could be ... [that is] locating situations that we know or expect to be ideal or exceptional on some a priori basis and then studying them to see what is actually going on there." Given the significant increases in student test scores, it was clear that Robert W. Coleman Elementary School was an example of "what could be" (Schofield, 1990, p. 217), especially in contrast to the stereotypical and negative reports by the media regarding the state of urban schools today. Specifically, our study of Coleman is intended to provide " ... some insight into how and why [the school is successful] and ... what the still-intractable problems are" (Schofield, 1990, p. 219).

Moreover, during my first few visits to Robert W. Coleman, I was struck by how much the principal, teachers, and students reminded me of the principals, teachers, and students I worked with in six highly successful public elementary schools in Chicago two years ago (see Bryk et al, 1993). The six successful elementary schools in Chicago were characterized by the following: a facilitative, inclusive principal leadership; a new image for the school and renewed sense of agency; sustained, school-wide staff development; hiring of quality new faculty; developing strong external connnections to support school development; and a strategic use of discretionary resources. In general, I have found Addie Johnson and members of the Coleman community to have developed and maintained many of these same

characteristics of a successful urban elementary school. More specifically, Addie Johnson's vision and everyday behaviors which sustain that vision closely parallel those of the Chicago principals I spent time with who were actively engaged in progressively restructuring their schools and subsequently increasing their students' achievement. For example, the following summary description of the Chicago principals I worked with is equally applicable to Addie Johnson:

> [The six Chicago] principals' enthusiasm, optimism, and passion for improvement draw people into the school and bring life to its mission. Each principal, in his or her won way, articulates a vision-in-outline of how `This can be a good school for our kids and our families.' Many of the principals' everyday social interactions, both in the school and in the community, involve reminding people of what the school is about. They discuss the kinds of intellectual and social experiences that are good for children, the kinds of adults who make up a good faculty, the ways that teachers should relate to students and their parents --- in general the kind of community institution this school should be. They invite conversation about each of these ideas. They are willing to articulate a strong stance and to engage in conflict if that is what it will take to move the school forward. Organizational change is not easy, but these principals are unwavering in their core beliefs, and they intend to persist (Bryk et al, 1993, p.27).

Furthermore, my research with Coleman students draws on recent studies of the development of resilience among urban children (e.g., Benard, 1991; Winfield, 1991). Resilience refers to urban learners' energy and their strategies for overcoming adversity. Resilience is fostered when educators provide urban children with caring, challenging, and meaningful classroom experiences that support children's racial identity, and instrinsic motivation in school, and enhance their resistance to the dangers of the inner city such as gangs, violence, and the use of illegal drugs. Resilience operates as a coping strategy, or protective mechanism, which facilitates a healthy response to risk situations which occur at

crucial times during one's life (Rutter, 1987). Recent research shows that many urban learners are competent, responsible, productive, and healthy individuals (Winfield, 1991). However, children in urban areas, particularly, are in the precarious position of suffering daily from dangerous forces beyond their control. Research findings indicate that students develop resilience in school from caring and supportive teachers and from an accelerated curriculum build on high expectations (Benard, 1991). Under these conditions, protective mechanisms which reduce the impact of urban environments which place children "at-risk," raise students' self-efficacy and self-esteem, and open new opportunities for learning can be developed. The notion that positive and supportive school experiences can help build resilience among urban children is a central theme of the Urban Learner Framework developed by the Urban Education Project at Research for Better Schools (Urban Education Project, 1994).

A key component of resilence is children developing a sense that they have a meaningful and hopeful future (Wilson, 1994; Winfield, 1991). However, little research has addressed those instructional activities and teacher-student relations which provide the foundation for urban children of color to develop a strong sense of a bright future. The preliminary research reported here represents some first steps toward understanding how teachers and the larger school community can foster and support a strong sense of future in urban children. The following sections present recurrent patterns from our observations and interviews with students at Robert W. Coleman Elementary School.

RECURRENT PATTERNS OF COLEMAN STUDENT EXPERIENCES

A common theme from our research indicates that Coleman Elementary School is characterized by a pervasive culture which supports academic success among its students.

Overall, we found students eager to succeed and teachers who consistently validate children's abilities (Lipman, 1995; Lipman and Kinney, 1994). This ubiquitous culture of academic success was found to have several key components all of which interact and combine to foster healthy human development and academic achievement. The following sections present three major patterns in the data: (1) Coleman students are enthusiastic about learning and find learning enjoyable; (2) Coleman students feel supported and respected at school; and (3) Coleman students believe that they have a bright future. These patterns will be discussed below from the students' perspective.

Coleman Students are Enthusiastic about Learning and Find Learning Enjoyable

"We get to learn!" This comment from a third grade Coleman student regarding the best thing about her class succintly summarizes the most prevalent pattern in the student data. My interviews with students and observations of classroom activities clearly indicate that the vast majority of Coleman students are enthusiastic about learning and they find learning enjoyable and subsequently exhibit the effort and focus on academic tasks which provide the foundation for doing well in school. Along these lines, a common reply from third graders to my question "What is the best thing about your school?" was "Learning!" Fourth and fifth grade students also expressed a strong interest in learning and satisfaction with year-round schooling. One girl said, "We learn new things every day, and I'm happy that they started year-round education, so we can learn more, and like we might get skipped [into the next grade], and we might be more smarter."

Students' interest in school and eagerness to learn were also discussed by third graders in the following terms; "What I like about teachers is that they help us learn more." Another

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third grader told me that the best thing about her class is that her teacher, "teaches us new things that we never knew before. I know I'm learning something." Simililarly, another third grader said that, "The thing that makes Coleman a good school is that we go year-round to learn more stuff than we did last year."

Students' excitement for learning was also evident in our classroom observations. Early in our visits to Coleman we observed high levels of enthusiasm and effort displayed by the students in classrooms during instructional activities. Students exhibited a great deal of eagerness to learn and to get good grades. Along these lines, we observed first graders confidently striding up to the board to work on math problems when called upon. Students reported feeling, "great," "pretty fine," "happy," and "excited" when they get the right answer. Observations of first graders indicated that when asked a question by the teacher usually about seventy-five percent of the students raised and waved their hands excitedly in the hopes of being called upon. Moreover, I noted that between 70 - 90 percent of the first graders were attentively listening to the teacher's lessons throughout the day.

Third graders also exhibited high levels of enthusiasm in their classes. For example, during a science lesson on insects, the teacher asked the students to provide "detail" in their answers to her questions. More than half of the students waved their hands eagerly in an attempt to answer the teacher's questions. Students acted proud and happy when they were called on and gave the right answer, and upset and sad when they got the wrong answer. Next the teacher started a reading lesson on a story about a spider which nicely tied into the science lesson on insects. I observed seventy-five percent of the students reading closely and searching for that day's assigned vocabulary words. Students were then asked to read and

spell their vocabulary words from the previous day and when they got them right they would excitedly say, "YES!"

I observed fifth graders highly engaged in a mathematics excercise during which the teacher quizzed individual students who were standing until they got a wrong answer. The teacher asked questions involving multiplication and division at a rapid pace in an attempt to stump the students. Similar to the third graders, when they answered a question correctly they smiled and yelled, "YES!" Finally, there was only one student left standing and he was declared the winner and his classmates cheered heartily for him.

In addition to the enthusiasm of students, we also learned from students that they notice and appreciate teachers being enthusiastic about their teaching. A third grade girl said, "I think she's a good teacher because she like to teach a lot, likes to do stuff." We also observed a first grade teacher very enthusiastically reading a story to her students who responded by listening closely and smiling at their teacher. The teacher was taking on the characters in the story in a colorful and meaningful fashion and the students' positive response appeared to be an indication of their appreciation of her enthusiasm for teaching.

Observations and interviews with students also indicated that most students thoroughly enjoy learning at Coleman. A common reply to my question, "What do you like most about your class?" is that the class is "FUN!" For example, a third grade boy said, "It is fun, it is fun to do science ..." Another third grade boy said that "[My teacher] gives us fun things to do." Fourth graders enjoyed the mathematics drill mentioned above saying that it was "fun" and "exciting." Coleman students described their teachers in similar terms. For example, a third grade girl said: "What I like about Ms. P.'s is that she is nice and she a good teacher and

she's fun!"

Coleman students' straightforward assertion that "learning is fun" for them appears to be related to the teaching strategies and classroom climate we observed at the school. Teachers provide many hands-on and interactive learning opportunities. Teachers also stress teamwork and student projects are generally not heavily teacher-directed. The classrooms are frequently characterized by a great deal of talk as students work together in cooperative groups. We also found that teachers respect students' interests and ideas. Addie Johnson summed up these patterns by suggesting "[T]hat the students are having so much fun and taking control of their [classroom activities] that they don't realize they are learning!" (A.E. Johnson, personal communication, March 24, 1995).

Overall, these findings regarding the enthusiasm for learning and the enjoyment Coleman students feel in class suggests that the school climate and teachers' classroom activities are ones in which the children are comfortable and highly motivated to put forth high levels of effort on academic tasks. In sum, a working hypothesis from our research so far suggests that high levels of enthusiasm for and enjoyment of learning among students is an indicator of high levels of student motivation and effort. This assertion requires further systematic investigation and will be related to other central aspects of the Coleman school context from the students' perspective which will be discussed next.

Coleman Students Feel Supported and Respected at School

Another recurrent pattern from our observations and interviews highlights the high levels of support and nurturance children receive from adults at Coleman. Consistent with our observations of Coleman teachers (see Lipman, 1995), students talked about how their teachers

are there to help them learn and to succeed in both their academic endeavors and personal lives. One third grade boy summed this finding up by saying, "They're teachers that we can count on." Another third grade boy told me that his teacher listens to them attentively and answers all their questions about their work. Moreover, a third grade girl said that her teacher "helps us get an education and learn other things."

Students' close relationships with their teachers may be due, at least in part, to strategies Coleman teachers consistently use in the classroom. These strategies center around giving consistent and supportive feedback to students who show effort and realize academic achievement. For example, a fifth grade teacher praised the boy who won the mathematics drill by saying to the rest of the class, "Let's give this boy a hand." A third grade teacher told some of his students that their work was "... very nicely done." This teacher also told his students after they had recited part of story that it was "nicely read!" The first grade teacher congratulated her students who got their spelling words correct by saying: "You can really spell, you're on the ball. When my brain gets tired, you all can write and spell. That makes me feel proud!"

A related issue revolves around the students' experience of being cared about as individuals. We frequently observed teachers putting their arms around the shoulders of a student who was upset or uncertain about schoolwork or some personal issue. Students remarked that they appreciated their teachers' caring and concern for them. For example, a third grader discussed her teacher in the following terms: "Like just like she says, `You don't take, you give'...she shows me by telling me I look nice, she like my hair and teaching [me] ...she treats me nice...I know she loves me...from the way she treats me." Other third

graders talked about how they appreciated knowing that their teachers want them to learn and care about them as individuals. One student told us how he knew that his teacher cared saying, "'Cause he tells us that he care about us and he shouts [at] us to make us work hard an make us listen very well and sometimes people don't be listening to him so we gotta go over there and turn our name over [on the bulletin board]." Another student said, "[my teacher] is special 'cause he tell us that he loves us."

Another related pattern from our observations and interviews with students indicates that teachers generally have high levels of respect for their students and frequently express a great deal of confidence in their students' ability to succeed academically. For example, one third grade girl said about her teacher, "Like if you're in a bad mood or something like that , she not like the other teachers. She won't make you do anything. She understands just how you feel, and she treats you like a regular person. She don't treat you like a child so I love her." Fourth and fifth grade boys learned about the importance of respect from their teacher. One student said, "[My teacher] is the best teacher....I say that because he treat us right. He said 'you treat somebody the way you want to be treated.' He give us respect and we give respect back." Fifth graders also talked about getting respect from their teachers in terms of teachers "understanding" them:" [My teacher] is an understanding teacher, he helps us out, he doesn't yell at us a lot." Other fifth graders talked about how they feel that a good teacher "understands the children!"

In addition, we found that teachers express and exhibit high levels of confidence in their students' abilities (see Lipman, 1995). The students appeared to respond to their teachers' confidence in them. For example, a third grade girl said the following, "[My

teacher] build my confidence up like this, she really show, to tell you the truth....just by letting me see her, just by letting me know I'm special, that I have a lot of love. Just by letting me know simple things, that how she build my confidence and I like the way she do it." In addition, I observed many students answering questions confidently in front of their classes on a regular basis. For example, one day the third graders were discussing Benjamin Bannecker's career and learning how to measure things. At the end of the period the teacher asked the students to summarize what they had been doing that day and a girl stood up with a great deal of poise and proudly stated, "We were measuring like Benjamin Bannecker; he helped build Washington, D.C.!" Overall, I interpret these findings as generating a working hypothesis along the following lines: When teachers consistently express and exhibit confidence in their students' abilities, students feel as though their teachers strongly support and respect them which in turn enhances students' effort and motivation to learn.

Students also received support and respect from their teachers in another way. I observed teachers being very open about their own school experiences. For example, one third grade girl said that her teacher shared a story about growing up; "She might say when she was a little girl, when she was in school, she didn't always understand the work, she didn't always understand the questions. She just knew right then and there that is is nothin' to be ashamed of and she tells us, 'if you don't know, don't be ashamed to ask!'" Teacher's stories and messages about their own lives may increase the likelihood that students put forth effort and feel supported by their teachers as children gain more trust in their teachers and realize that many adults went through what they are experiencing.

We also found that students were clearly receiving and understanding messages from their teachers about the importance of effort. For example, students told me things like the following: "[My teacher] helps you a lot when you have hard problems. He gives you a hand and he helps you with it and he talks to you and says you could pass it only if you try hard and stuff like that." We also found that teachers gave supportive encouragement to their students so they wouldn't get overly frustrated if they were having trouble with a lesson. For example, a fourth grader likes his teacher, "'Cause see he encouraged us...like say if we get the wrong answer on a test, he don't get mad, he just tell us 'Try it again.'." Similarly, a third grader talked about how his teacher would tell him, "'I'm sorry, you need to try a little harder.' He wouldn't say it is not good enough, but he would say something like, 'It is not really what I'm looking for.'" These remarks from students support my observations of the many caring and supportive teachers at Coleman who consistently give respect to their students and impart messages which emphasize the importance of effort.

The support and respect Coleman students receive from their teachers theoretically enhances their resilience. Researchers have reported a strong relationship between nurturing interpersonal interactions and the development of resilience (Benard, 1991; Winfield, 1991). It is important to note that the support and respect Coleman students experience at school occurs in both their academic and personal worlds. During the daily flow of life at Coleman it is hard to differentiate between the two worlds since adults are always stressing the importance of academic effort and achievement while sometimes in their next breath they are efficiently and effectively attending to students' personal concerns. These findings corroborate Lipman's (1995, pp. 12 - 15) discussion of "connectedness" and the "parenting stance" of adults toward

children she found at Coleman. Furthermore, these findings from the students' perspective strongly support the inclusion of resilience as a key element of the Urban Learner Framework (Urban Education Project, 1994).

In sum, I interpret these findings as suggesting the following working hypothesis: Coleman students' experience of receiving high levels of support and respect at school motivate them to put forth effort on academic tasks. This working hypothesis requires further research and has been discussed by Nel Noddings (1988) in the following terms: "My guess is that when schools focus on what really matters in life, the cognitive ends we now pursue so painfully and artificially will be achieved somewhat more naturally ... It is obvious that children will work harder and do things --- even odd things like adding fractions --- for people they love and trust" (see also Ayers, 1993). Urban educators have long argued that developing and maintaining genuine caring, trust, and respect between teachers and students are crucial for learning (Erickson, 1987). I now turn to the third and final recurrent pattern in the student data.

Coleman Students Believe That They Have a Bright Future

A related issue to the support and respect Coleman students experienced at school is that they feel their teachers have high expectations for them and believe they have a bright future. This aspect of Coleman student experiences is slightly different than teachers having confidence in their students' abilities discussed in the last section. I interpret Coleman teachers' having high expectations for their students as having confidence in their students' long-term careers as opposed to confidence in completing academic tasks in the near future. Along these lines, we frequently observed teachers expressing high expectations for their

students. For example, a fifth grader said that his teacher "encourages us a lot and we learn a whole lot in his class [about different jobs for the future]!"

Overall, I have continually noticed how the deep, genuine, and intense commitment of teachers, administrators, parents, and staff at Coleman is focused on developing children's academic and social strengths so they will have a bright future. Lipman (1995, pp. 19 - 22) has discussed adults' efforts throughout the school to build a sense of future among the students. From observations and interviews, I learned from the students that at least some of the adults' efforts are having an impact on them. One indicator along these lines is that students express high expectations and aspirations for themselves. I observed and heard from the students that the teachers frequently discuss a wide range of possible occupations which the children are interested in. For example, one student told us, "I want to be a teacher like [my science teacher]...he gives us some ideas about what our plans might be."

Teachers also talk about the importance of having more than one goal. This concern was directed primarily at the boys, many of whom hope to be star basketball and football players as adults. Therefore, the teachers encourage the students to have several options and plans to reach those goals. For example, a fourth grade boy said, "I want to be a football player or a basketball player, or a chef, or a lawyer, or mayor, or cop, or engineer, or artist." He went on to say, "You got to go to college for all that stuff if you want to have back-ups." In sum, students expressed high aspirations such as wanting to be basketball players, lawyers, engineers, doctors, and artists and they usually had ideas about what they might do if they did not achieve their primary goal.

In addition to having high aspirations, many students expressed interest in occupations which involved community and social responsibility. A fifth grade boy stated, "I want to be a judge, or a police worker 'cause I want to take the drug dealers off the street. I want to make it a better community so the children will be able to come outside, instead of being scared to come outside on their own block, because of all these drug dealers." A third grade girl said, "I might be a nurse and a doctor. I [want to] take care of people so they won't die." Moreover, fifth graders who participated in the Helping One Student to Succeed (H.O.S.T.S.) peer mentoring program reading to first graders exhibited a strong sense of responsibiltity to help their younger peers do well in school. I observed them taking their mentoring role seriously and expressing satisfaction with knowing that they can make a difference in younger children's lives. Some of these mentors expressed desire to become teachers; thus their sense of future was tied to a sense of social responsibility.

Other students expressed interest in jobs that would allow them to do things they like to do and are finding out they do well. For instance, a third grade girl said, "I might be [an] artist 'cause I like to draw." Participation in Intersession Courses provided many children with an opportunity to learn about possible future occupations. Discussions with teachers revealed that some of them are sensitive to recognizing and developing their students' multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1993). In addition, we found that teachers frequently sprinkled references to possible future careers during their instructional activities and students reported interest in hearing about different jobs. Coppin State University students mentor Coleman students and introduce the children to what it is like to go to college. Furthermore, a counselor at Coleman coordinates a program which invites professionals of color from the

neighborhood and city to visit the school and talk with students about their educational and career histories. Overall, Coleman students frequently hear about a range of possible occupations and have the opportunity to interact with people working in various jobs or attending college. I interpret these findings as providing support for the following working hypothesis: Coleman students who believe they have a bright future are more resilient and are more motivated to put forth effort to succeed academically than students who do not harbor such beliefs about their futures. Further research on the working hypotheses presented above could refine and increase the applicability of the Urban Learner Framework for educators interested in progressive school change.

DISCUSSION

In general, Coleman students strongly reminded me of the happy, hard-working, and high achieving elementary school students I worked with in six of the most successful public schools in Chicago. The preliminary findings reported above suggest that the ongoing work of Addie E. Johnson, her staff, parents, and community members is paying dividends. Adults connected to Coleman have built a strong foundation upon which their children stand and succeed. The enthusiasm, effort, and expectations of Coleman students provide ample evidence of the remarkable promise of the next generation.

In light of this promise I have some concerns and questions. What will happen to these children when they leave Coleman? (Addie Johnson is currently working on a proposal to connect Coleman to its middle and high school feeder schools under one vision and centralized leadership). Another major concern is the lower levels of academic engagement we observed among some fourth and fifth grade males (Lipman and Kinney, 1994). Along these lines,

some of these older students said that classes can be "boring" at times. We observed some students who appeared disconnected from classroom instruction. Students are aware that some of their peers are not as interested in school as they are. As one student said, "Some kids don't listen." Teachers also raised their concern with some of the older students not performing up to their ability and corroborated our observations regarding some of the older students' disengagement from school. As Lipman (1995, p.28) has noted, "We wonder if there is a connection between their disengagement and the curriculum. Is it related to peer pressure against academic success as some some researchers have suggested (e.g., Fordham and Ogbu, 1986), and how does one account for this process in a context which models African American academic excellence?"

Pauline and I are also concerned about the consequences of single gender classes. Students reported enjoying being separated from the opposite sex and felt that it allowed them to focus on their academic tasks (e.g., "I like [single gender classes], instead of having boys pickin' on you all the time, and when they get by you they always messin' with you, and you're trying to work ... sometimes it's just they like you" [5th grade girl]; "Because some of those girls, in my old school we had girl and boys classes and the girls kept on talking and we be looking at them and like [saying] 'Shut up!'" [3rd grade boy]). However, like several teachers and counselors, we are worried about issues regarding gender role socialization and we wonder how these children will fare when they get to middle school and are enrolled in co-ed classes. On the other hand, initial test scores from students enrolled in single gender classes appear to suggest that children, especially males, are benefitting academically from this arrangement (Johnson, 1995).

If Addie E. Johnson and her colleagues receive the support and resources to make their vision of school improvement and community revitatilization a reality, children growing up in the neighborhood are in good hands. Plans to develop instruction and curricula around children's multiple intelligences and cultural backgrounds (Baytops, 1992; Gardner, 1993; Tharp, 1989, 1993) are underway which would build on the strong foundation already put in place at Coleman and possibly boost Coleman students' achievement higher. It appears that the foundation in place at Coleman which supports and enhances children's natural enthusiasm and effort and provides a strong sense of future is a necessary condition for school restructuring which will truly make a difference.

APPENDIX A
STUDENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1-How long have been attending this school? (If transfer student, find out how Coleman compares to their other school(s)).
2-Do you have any brothers and sisters? How many? How old are they? Do they attend Coleman?
3-What do you like best about _____ class? (class observed).
4-What things do your teachers do here at school --- that help you learn? --- that make you want to try hard at school? --- that help you think about what you want to do when you grow up?
5-To you, a successful student is?
6-What does academic success mean to you?
7-How do students become academically successful here?
8-What do you have to do to get good grades here?
9-If you were talking to younger students, or students who were new at this school, what would you tell them to do so that they would be successful?
10-What is your favorite thing to do at this school?
11-What is your least favorite thing to do at this school?
12-What was the best thing that ever happened to you at school?
13-If you could change anything about school what would it be?
14-What makes a good teacher?
15-How do you know someone cares about you?
16-What do your parents do?
17-How would you describe your neighborhood to someone who has never been there?
18-Do you feel safe in your neighborhood?
19-Do you feel safe at school?
20-What did you do yesterday/ yesterday after school? Last weekend? Over the summer?
21-What are your favorite things to do outside of school?
22-Who do you do those things with? Where?
23-What kinds of music do you listen to? What kinds of magazines, books do you read?
24-What do you want to do when you grow up? [What do you want to be when you grow up?].
25-What do you do with your parents? Do you go out together? -What do you do together at home?
26-Do you have any responsibilities or jobs? How did you learn those?
27-Do you have any questions for me?

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